

Meeting Summary

Hamilton/Bel Marin Keys Wetlands Restoration Project

Annual Public Meeting

June 7th, 2012, 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Location: Novato Arts Building
Upstairs "War Room"
500 Palm Drive, Novato, CA 94949

Meeting Purpose: Provide the community and interested parties with:

- An update on the Hamilton/Bel Marin Keys wetlands restoration project
- An opportunity on upcoming volunteer plants programs
- Information on mosquito abatement techniques

Action Items:

- Members of the public interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities with native plants can e-mail Christina McWhorter at 1plantminded1@gmail.com.
- Project managers will post the meeting handout, a meeting summary and more information about volunteering on the project website at <http://hamiltonwetlands.scc.ca.gov>.

Substantive Meeting Outcomes:

1. Welcome and Introduction:

Tom Gandesbery, Hamilton Wetlands Project Manager for the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC), welcomed the group and introduced Robin Liffmann from partner agency the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), which oversees the wetlands construction. He shared that the SCC recently published a report called Celebrating Fifteen Years: The San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program which showcases its accomplishments and restoration projects around the Bay Area.

2. Update: Hamilton/Bel Marin Keys Wetlands Restoration Project

Hamilton Phase 1

Robin Liffmann of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provided an update on the restoration efforts at Hamilton Air Field. Her key points included:

- The wildlife corridor and seasonal wetland areas are the last portions of the first phase of the project to complete. The Corps expects to conduct area earth-shaping in late summer or early fall 2012.
- Plantings will begin in some areas near the nursery, with full planting efforts to occur in July, or sooner.
- The Corps anticipates construction of the Bay Trail to start late fall 2012 or early spring 2013.
- The breach of the outer levee may occur in January 2013, or in late fall 2013. Factors that impact the construction start date include the readiness of construction efforts, as the construction

requires a specific sequence of events, and whether the construction schedule will happen during the clapper rail breeding and nesting season.

Questions & Comments:

Q: What is the overall cost of the Project?

A: The estimated total for the whole project is \$300 million, with \$110 million for the Hamilton portion.

Q: Who paid for it?

A: The federal government has been providing 75% of the costs and the state has been providing 25%.

Q: What percentage of the cost is the dredging?

A: 85%.

Bel Marin Keys Unit V

Tom Gandesbery of the State Coastal Conservancy provided the latest information on the Project's second phase at Bel Marin Keys Unit V (BMK). Key points included:

- BMK is twice as large as the Hamilton restoration area. The project's cost share amount has shifted, and that the SCC needs to seek Congressional approval to adjust the funding allocation before it can move forward with the BMK restoration. The SCC is currently responsible for 25% of the project costs.
- The benefit to conducting the project in two phases is that, with the completion of restoration of the Hamilton area, there are cost figures available to inform the second phase cost estimates for BMK. The Corps used a barge dredge to excavate sediment near the site and fill the marsh for the first phase of restoration in Hamilton, and the SCC and the Corps will work to determine if there is another way to bring fill to the area that is less expensive.
- The plan is to have the front two-thirds of the BMK site use sediment fill and the back third will be seasonal wetland. There will be improvements to the informal trails around Pacheco Pond and between Hamilton and BMK.
- The restoration work in the BMK will have three breach sections.

Questions & Comments:

Comment: We are interested in the flood control district's area and its relationship with the BMK restoration area.

Q: The BMK tidal area in front of the levee – will it be standing water?

A: It will be tidal.

Q: Is there a way to break up the wave action?

A: Yes.

Comment: It would be nice if the berm had a natural look rather than a linear design.

Q: How soon could the BMK phase start?

A: It's not certain when the next phase will start.

Comment: There is concern that the use of a suction dredge machine to stockpile sediment in the aquatic transfer facility will impact state and federally listed endangered and threatened fish species in the Bay.

Response: The Corps is aware of this issue, and will conduct a cost/benefit analysis of the harm to endangered aquatic species in the bay where sediment is collected, as well as benefits to species by restoring habitat. The species of concern include green sturgeon and longfin smelt. The project will look at ways to modify sediment collection processes to help reduce impacts to those species.

Q: Will the power substation at BMK remain?

A: No, in fact it has already been removed.

Q: There were questions on the design and management of the Hamilton and BMK portion of the San Francisco Bay Trail (Bay Trail), particularly how the SCC will design future sections of the trail to connect with existing Bay Trail segments, how it would cross Novato Creek, and how to establish Bay Trail segments to the north.

A: The City of Novato is also concerned about management of the trail. The goal is for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to receive ownership of the trail and maintain it. Another goal is for this branch of trail to eventually connect across the Highway 37 area to provide greater access to other parts of the Bay. Planners are in discussion on how best to achieve this goal.

Maureen Gaffney from the Bay Trail provided additional information on the overall goal for this section of trail. Currently, the Bay Trail has 325 miles of completed trails, and this section along the restoration project is 2.6 miles. Bay Trail staffers seek to complete more miles as opportunities become available. The Bay Trail will connect with the SMART (Sonoma/Marin Area Rail Transit) pathway.

Identify Key Issues of Community Interest for Future Discussions

Facilitator Ariel Ambruster asked meeting participants what issues are of key interest to them that they would like to see as topics at future meetings. Responses included:

- Information on the Hamilton and BMK sections of the Bay Trail, including the bigger picture, the impacts and opportunities, including impacts on the Bel Marin Keys community.
- Follow-up and additional information on the project's dredging systems.
- The soils issue.
- There was a request to have the meeting agenda and minutes available on the website.

3. Upcoming Volunteer Planting & Nursery Opportunities

Christina McWhorter, Hamilton Wetlands Restoration Nursery Manager, discussed the Project nursery and planting program, and ways that members of the public can help in getting native plants propagated and established. Key points included:

- The first phase of the revegetation process is to collect seeds in the summer and fall. The public is welcome to participate in this effort.
- The nursery building is where seed propagation will occur, as well as local community education about the vegetation and planting of native species in the wetland. There will be a demonstration site to showcase local plants.
- Volunteers can participate in propagation and preparing plants for transplanting. The goal is also to have community volunteers assist with the planting efforts and site monitoring.

- There will be opportunities for students of different ages, and community members with all types of abilities to volunteer.
- The nursery will be available during the week, morning or afternoons, mainly Tuesdays or Thursdays. There are also plans for an evening session for volunteers to do transplant work.
- Individuals interested in participating as a volunteer were offered the opportunity to fill out an interest form.
- Christina McWhorter can be contacted at 1plantminded1@gmail.com.

Questions & Comments:

Q: When can volunteers start?

A: The goal is to start working with volunteers immediately to start coordinating. We will definitely need volunteers around the end of July or August, a week after the nursery building is open.

Q: Will there be volunteer days on Saturdays?

A: Possibly once a month. We can poll to determine community preferences.

Q: What relationship will the nursery have with Students and Teachers Restoring a Watershed (STRAW, which works with schools to involve students in site restoration planting as part of biology curriculum)?

A: There are discussions with the STRAW coordinator on ways to engage students. A plan will be developed to engage adults and students to do the planting in the wetlands. The goal is to have STRAW and the Hamilton and BMK Wetland Restoration project expand to work with high school students, who would help with tracking the outcomes.

Q: What is the survival rate of the species once planted?

A: It depends on the species. Plants in more muddy areas tend to have higher survival rates. The approach is to overplant to account for survival rates.

Q: Are you hydroseeding with mycorrhizae and such?

A: We hydroseeded in the fall, a processes that broadcasts seeds across a large area, and did not use fertilizer in the nursery. The hydroseeding occurred in the wildlife corridor areas and along the outer edge of the levees. It has had good success.

Q: What will be happening inside the nursery?

A: There will be a lot of seed processing, such as cleaning and weighing, to prepare it for storage. There are also areas for pre-germination treatment, as well as the propagation benches. The education area in the nursery is where we will work with volunteers and students. There is lab space to test soil samples.

Q: Will there be grow lights?

A: We have florescent lights in the building, but we will use grow lights if necessary. A south-facing roll-up door will provide natural light. The building will be a pleasant and engaging space for the volunteers.

Q: Will we be able to walk to Ammo Hill? Right now the fence around the nursery blocks the path.

A: The goal is to have the trail accessible again, and right now the plan is to complete construction by July, so there will be access to the trail at that time.

4. Presentation: Mosquitoes, Wetlands and Abatement Techniques

Erik Hawk, Assistant Manager of the Marin-Sonoma Mosquito and Vector Control District (District), explained the District's mosquito and vector control efforts, and how the District will work with the restoration project. Key points included:

- The District seeks to control mosquitoes as well as yellow jackets, rodents such as mice and rats, and ticks.
- The District seeks collaborative involvement with projects to minimize repeat application of control materials, and has good relationships with many of the regulatory agencies.
- At Hamilton, the District monitors for mosquito infestations and uses chickens to test for the West Nile virus. The chickens are not harmed by the process; they develop antibodies to the virus, and are tested by blood sampling. The District collects water samples to determine mosquito species and density to design control efforts. To control mosquitoes, the District uses mosquitocide or bacterial products to kill larvae, as well as methoprene, a growth hormone that keeps mosquitoes in the larval stage. Its toxicity to animals and humans is extremely low, and allows the larvae to serve as a food source for other species.
- The District's goal is to have good communication with the public, and relies on the public to report issues.
- The District will hold an open house for the public to come see the equipment and to learn about control efforts. The event will be on September 15th from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. It also holds Mosquito Fest, an educational program that teaches K-3 students about insects and nature.

Questions and Comments:

Q: What is the website to report issues with mosquitoes and other vectors?

A: Individuals can report issues at www.msosquito.com. The term "vector" means something that bites or causes discomfort, and passes disease. The District does not control for mice or ticks in the wetland. The District does provide information to people on how to protect themselves and their family against tick bites.

Q: What are the surveillance efforts for ticks?

A: The District uses long flannel flags to collect ticks to test for disease. The District does not use mammals for tick testing.

Q: Will there be more salt water mosquitoes after the breach?

A: No, in fact, there will probably be a reduction to historic levels as the natural system of tides and water exchange will flush the wetlands and help reduce populations.

Q: Does the District control for all 27 mosquito species? Are there some species that are prone to carry diseases over others?

A: All species have some characteristics that are harmful. The District tries to control for all the species, but focuses on disease-carrying species.

Q: Does the District have its own lab, and is it available for other groups to use, as the County lab has closed?

A: We were not aware that the County lab closed. The District's lab only processes its own samples, but we will keep an open mind about possible future needs to test other samples sources if necessary.

Q: Do midges bite and does the District have control efforts?

A: The local species of midges are a swarming but not a biting type. Unfortunately, they are difficult to control. Winds are good to control the midges.

Closing Remarks, Next Steps

Tom Gandesbery and Robin Liffmann thanked participants for attending. Tom Gandesbery invited members of the public to visit the project website for updates and information. He said the goal is to continue to hold annual meetings to update the community about the project.

More information about the project can be found at www.hamiltonwetlands.scc.ca.gov.

Meeting Presenters and Support Staff:

Tom Gandesbery, State Coastal Conservancy

Robin Liffmann, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Christina McWhorter, Hamilton Wetlands Restoration Nursery Manager

Erik Hawk, Marin-Sonoma Mosquito and Vector Control District

Eric Jolliffe, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Ariel Ambruster, Center for Collaborative Policy, Facilitator

Grace Person, Center for Collaborative Policy, Note-taker